

# THE STOLEN SHAKESPEARE

*Astro, Master of Mysteries, Fails to Run Down His Quarry*

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Drawings by Karl Anderson

MR. BARRISTER," Valeska announced, and left the two men.

The newcomer looked about a bit foolishly, and then turned to the palmist. "You're Astro, I suppose?"

The young man in the robe and turban bowed gravely and his glance slumbered.

"Eh—ah—the fact is, sir," continued Barrister, "that I have come here about a peculiar matter, and solely, sir, to please my wife. She has a woman's weakness for anything occult,—anything full of folderol and fake. You see, I don't take any stock in it myself; but—"

"I understand perfectly," said the Master of Mysteries without apparent annoyance. He seemed, in fact, to be already bored.

The other teetered affably on his toes and heels, condescension in his manner. "She had heard that you professed to be some kind of medium, besides doing this palmistry business. Is that so?"

"I have had occasion at times to use certain powers which are—ah—supposed to be occult. I say 'supposed to be,' out of deference to your manifest feelings in the matter, Mr. Barrister."

"Hum!" said the prospective client quickly. "Well, whether they are or not doesn't matter in this case, as I'm simply here to please my wife. If I didn't come, she'd come, you know. However, if you are able to locate what we want, I'll be willing to acknowledge anything you wish, and pay you accordingly. I suppose you are a medium, then?"

"Some call it that," acknowledged the reserved young man. "I myself assert that I have merely done a few things that others find it too hard to do."

"Such as—"

"Kindly let me look at your hand."

"Bosh!" said Barrister; but he gazed at his own palm, nevertheless, with a new air of curiosity, and after a moment stretched it toward the palmist. "Well, see what you can find in it!" he said.

Astro looked at it negligently; then, under his half shut lids his eyes sped rapidly over his client's person, the neat business suit beneath the black dress overcoat, the daintily tied scarf, the highly polished shoes, and the general air of careful grooming. Then they returned to the hand before him. Finally, the seer leaned back listlessly and smiled.

"You went to see Anna Held last night, and were bored. You once had your pocket picked, and will probably have it happen to you again. You are interested in Egyptology—and, apropos, I wish you'd look at my porphyry sphinx there and give me some idea of its age."

Barrister stared, and grew a bit uneasy. Then, apparently to hide his embarrassment, he turned to the carved image and surveyed it with the air of a connoisseur. As he presented his back to the seer, the latter swiftly stooped over, picked up a return check of a New York theater good the night before, and slid it into one of the pockets of his silk robe.

"That's about 1400 B. C.," said Barrister easily.

"Where on earth did you get hold of it?"

"From my godfather, in Cairo," said the palmist.

"Well," said Barrister, returning, "I've no time now to examine it closely."

AND the matter which worries your wife?" Astro inquired.

Again his visitor hesitated, looked about the room, and gazed again at the sphinx. "Well," he said finally, "I'll tell you." He seated himself and went on: "I have, or rather did have, a First Folio Shakespeare, one of the few genuine ones of the thirty-seven copies extant. It was stolen from my library yesterday. That's what I want to find—"

"That, and the one who stole it also, I suppose?"

"Er—yes. Yes, certainly."

"An interesting sort of quarry, and rather unusual. Have you been to the police?"

"No. You see, there wouldn't be much use in that, would there? I'm afraid the thief, if he found he was suspected, would destroy the book. He

can't sell it, anyway; for these folios are as well known to collectors as good race horses are to touts. He can't get away with it; for every bookman in the world will soon know it if he offers it for sale. I want it back, of course; and this is my wife's idea, this coming to you about it. She gave me the book when we were first married, and so, naturally, I value it at even more than its own great intrinsic value."

"Have you ever had any offers for it?" Astro asked carelessly.

"What? Offers? Oh, no; no indeed; no offers at all. Why should I want to sell it? No, sir! It would be useless for anyone to attempt to buy it."

"But nobody is harming you by offering. When did you miss it?"

"Last night, after I came home from the theater. I went to see Anna Held, as you said, though how the mischief you knew I can't see, and we came home early, of course. We happened to be talking about the folio, and my wife walked to the case and looked for it. It was gone."

"Was the lock tampered with?"

"Yes; forced. The window had been pried open with a jimmy too. It was evidently done by a burglar that knew just what he wanted. But it doesn't look like a professional's work; for the book would be too hard to dispose of."

"I see," said Astro. He gazed away into space and puffed at his water pipe meditatively. "Mr. Barrister, I'll try to find it for you. If I succeed in getting the book or the person that stole it from you, my charge will be five hundred dollars."

"All right," said Barrister, rising. "Will you want to come up to my house and look over the place?"

"I think I can put myself more in rapport with the case, if I do; I want to feel the vibrations, so to speak, and no doubt I'll get an impression of

the aura of the culprit if I am on the spot. The rest I shall do with the crystals."

Barrister did not conceal his scorn. "Oh, very well," he said, "I suppose it will at least satisfy my wife. When will you be up?"

"To-morrow morning, early. I'll ask you to disturb nothing, and even to keep away from the room until I come."

"There's nothing to disturb," Barrister commented; "but I'll see to it that nobody interferes with your magic." And so saying, he took up his hat, gave the sphinx one last glance, and left the room.

THE moment he was gone the palmist doffed his regalia and yawned. A moment later the girl reentered the studio. Astro gazed at her reflectively.

"Didn't you notice that man's watch charm?" he asked.

"Why, there was something funny about it; but I couldn't make the thing out exactly."

"Did you ever see an Egyptian scarab?"

"Why, yes. But he didn't have one, did he?"

"He used to have one. You know how they mount them,—with a pin through the beetle so it can revolve? The setting and the pin were there; but not the stone. You must look closer next time."

"What else did I miss?" she asked, frowning.

"You didn't say anything about his carrying his purse in his outside overcoat pocket. He will always be an easy mark for the light fingered gentry if he keeps that up. It's lucky for him that he's rich."

"Oh, he is wealthy, then! I got that much right, anyway. He looked as if he was well off."

"I should imagine he was, with a First Folio Shakespeare lying loose in his library! That's what we've got to find."

"It's interesting?"

"Interesting! I should say so! It's a regular kidnapping case. Talk about diamonds! Why, they're stupid things. Everyone likes diamonds, and they can be cut up into smaller stones and readily disposed of, if you're careful about it. But you can't cut a page out of a First Folio, you can't

even hint that you'd like to sell it, without all the world knowing about it. Book hunters are the most determined and interesting collectors in the world. I know of no passion to equal it."

He walked over to the telephone and called up a leading dealer in rare volumes.

"I wish to ask about a First Folio Shakespeare. Are there any bidders in the open market for a copy?" He wrote down rapidly on a tab as he spoke into the receiver,—"William A. Hepson. Oh, yes, the millionaire. Ah, thank you."

He slammed the instrument down vigorously, snatched up a telegraph blank, rapidly wrote a message, and handed it to Valeska.

She read it aloud:

WILLIAM A. HEPSON, Chicago, Ill.—Will you give four thousand dollars for a guaranteed First Folio Shakespeare? Wire reply to Jane Gore, 181 East 18th-st., New York.

"My!" she exclaimed. "Have you located it already?"

"Not quite. But I have an idea, and this will help if we get an answer by to-morrow morning."

"Who is he?"

"He's a Chicago beef packer who offered four thousand dollars for the book awhile ago; but, curiously enough, he was in town this week."

"Is he in the city now?"

"That's what I should like very much to know myself. In the meantime, send this, get the answer at your place, and bring it to me in the morning. Then we'll go up and see Mrs. Barrister."

VALESKA appeared next morning with a yellow envelop. "He refuses your offer," she said.

"Good!" shouted the Master of Mysteries, rubbing his hands in satisfaction. "He has the folio, then, as I suspected. Now, to work! This case already begins to offer delicate little labyrinths which are nothing short of delicious to the analytical mind. We'll lose no time getting out to Mrs. Bar-



Finally, Dismayed, He Took the Check from Valeska.